

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 NSAE-00 NSCE-00
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O R 202305Z OCT 77
FM AMEMBASSY QUITO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6107
INFO AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY LIMA

C O N F I D E N T I A L QUITO 7285

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: ELAB, PINS, PINT, SHUM, EC
SUBJECT: LABOR VIOLENCE: 23 STRIKERS KILLED FOLLOWING POLICE
ACTION

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: THE PRESS HAS CARRIED REPORTS OF 23
DEATHS OCT 18, FOLLOWING THE DISLODGING BY POLICE OF
STRIKING WORKERS OCCUPYING THE AZTRA SUGAR MILL NEAR GUAYAQUIL.
CEOSL PRESIDENT JOSE CHAVEZ TOLD POL/LABOFF THAT MOST VICTIMS
DIED OF GUNSHOT WOUNDS. MANY WORKERS REMAIN MISSING AND IT
IS FEARED THAT THE FINAL TOTAL MAY BE CONSIDERABLY HIGHER THAN
NOW BEING REPORTED. CIVIL DISTURBANCES IN THE AZTRA COMPANY
TOWN HAVE RESULTED IN THE DEATH OF AT LEAST ONE DEMONSTRATOR
WHO DIED FROM A POLICE BULLET. THE SITUATION AT AZTRA, THOUGH
THE GOE CLAIMS THE MILL HAS RETURNED TO WORK, REMAINS TENSE.
THE POSSIBILITY OF LABOR SOLIDARITY STRIKES AND STUDENT
DEMONSTRATIONS MAY SIGNIFICANTLY AFFECT THE GOE'S STABILITY.

2. PRESS REPORTS APPEARED OCT 20 INDICATING THAT 23 WORKERS
DIED OCT 18 AT THE GOE MANAGED AND PARTIALLY-OWNED
AZTRA SUGAR MILL NEAR GUAYAQUIL FOLLOWING A POLICE MOVE TO
EXPULSE STRIKERS WHO HAD OCCUPIED THE PLANT. THE WORKERS BEGAN
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THEIR PEACEFUL OCCUPATION OF THE FACILITY OCTOBER 16
FOLLOWING MANAGEMENT'S REFUSAL TO CONSIDER A UNION CLAIM
DEMANDING THAT THE MILL FULFILL A PROVISION IN THE COLLECTIVE
AGREEMENT PROVIDING WORKERS A PORTION OF A 1976 INCREASE OF
SUGAR PRICES. A SPOKESMAN FOR THE MINISTER OF GOVERNMENT HAS
ANNOUNCED THAT POLICE MOVED INTO THE MILL, FIRING TEAR GAS,
FOLLOWING THE STRIKERS' REFUSAL TO HEED A POLICE DEMAND THAT

THEY PEACEFULLY ABANDON THE PROPERTY. THE GOVERNMENT ACCOUNT STATES THAT THE WORKERS PANICKED AND FLED BY THE WRONG EXIT, CAUSING THEM TO FALL INTO AN IRRIGATION CANAL AND DROWN.

3. CEOSL PRESIDENT JOSE CHAVEZ INFORMED POL/LABOFF OCT 20 THAT THERE ARE UPWARD OF 25 DEATHS, MOST OF WHICH RESULTED FROM POLICE GUNFIRE. ACCORDING TO CHAVEZ (THE AZTRA UNION IS AN AFFILIATE OF THE AIFLD-CONNECTED CEOSL), THE WORKERS WERE NOT IN FACT IN OCCUPATION OF THE FACTORY BUT WERE RATHER IN A PATIO WITH ONLY ONE EXIT. POLICE DEMANDED THEIR DEPARTURE AND THEN IMMEDIATELY ATTACKED. HE ADDED THAT THE VICTIMS' BODIES HAVE BEEN TAKEN FROM THEIR FAMILIES AND HAVE NOT YET BEEN RETURNED FOR BURIAL BECAUSE THE POLICE DO NOT WANT TO ADMIT THAT THE STRIKERS DIED FROM POLICE VIOLENCE. CHAVEZ' ACCOUNT ABOUT THE BODY SNATCHING ARE CONFIRMED BY SEVERAL EYEWITNESS MEDIA REPORTS.

4. THE GOE SPOKESMAN SAID THAT AN INVESTIGATION WAS UNDERWAY TO DETERMINE RESPONSIBILITY BUT IMPLIED THAT THE STRIKE LEADERS DELIBERATELY HOPED TO GAIN MARTYRS. AT THIS TIME THE ORIGIN OF THE POLIFE ORDER TO EXPEL THE WORKERS IS UNCLEAR, BUT CHAVEZ BLAMES BOTH THE MINISTERS OF GOVERNMENT AND LABOR. ACCORDING TO CHAVEZ, NO ORDER TO REMOVE STRIKERS IS LEGAL UNLESS A FINDING OF STRIKE ILLEGALITY IS MADE IN THE MINISTRY OF LABOR AND UNLESS THE ORDER IS GIVEN BY THE COMPETENT LABOR INSPECTOR. NEITHER OF THESE CONDITIONS
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WAS MET.

5. FOLLOWING THE DEATHS AT AZTRA, CIVIL DISORDER BROKE OUT AT THE AZTRA COMPANY TOWN, RESULTING IN AT LEAST ONE DEATH FROM POLICE GUNFIRE. THE SITUATION THERE IS STILL TENSE. ACCORDING TO RADIO NEWS ACCOUNTS, THE POLICE, WHO HAD CALLED IN FIREMEN TO HELP RECOVER BODIES FROM THE CANAL, HAVE NOW DISPATCHED THE FIREMEN AFTER THEY BROUGHT UP 14 BODIES FROM THE DITCH AND HAVE SEALED OFF THE AREA. LABOR LEADERS SAY THAT BETWEEN 50 AND 100 WORKERS ARE STILL MISSING, THOUGH THEY DO NOT KNOW HOW MANY ARE DEAD AND HOW MANY ARE IN HIDING TO AVOID POLICE VIOLENCE. THE GOE CURRENTLY HAS A NUMBER OF LABOR LEADERS UNDER ARREST IN CONNECTION WITH THE AZTRA INCIDENT, INCLUDING A CEOSL ORGANIZER, SANTIAGO ESPINOSA, WHO IS ACCUSED OF FOMENTING THE VIOLENCE AND OF ATTEMPTING TO RUN OVER THE POLICE COMMANDER IN AN AUTOMOBILE.

6. LABOR IS STILL IN A STATE OF SHOCK FOLLOWING THE DEATHS AND THEIR LIKELY COURSE OF ACTION IS UNCLEAR. CHAVEZ SAYS THAT HE WILL CALL FOR THE REMOVAL OF THE MINISTERS OF LABOR AND GOVERNMENT. AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL REPORTS THAT PROVINCIAL

LEADERS OF THREE NATIONAL LABOR CONFEDERATIONS MET WITH THE GOVERNOR OF GUAYAS (GUAYAQUIL) TODAY AND THE PRESIDENTS OF THE THREE LABOR CONFEDERATIONS MET IN QUITO THIS MORNING. A JOINT PRONOUNCEMENT CONDEMNING THE POLICE ACTION IS EXPECTED. THE CEOSL AFFILIATED SUGAR WORKERS' FEDERATION, TO WHICH THE AZTRA UNION BELONGS, IS CONSIDERING CALLING FOR A NATIONAL GENERAL STRIKE IN PROTEST. A COMPLETE LABOR SHUT-DOWN OF THE COUNTRY'S SUGAR MILLS IS UNDER CONSIDERATION. MEANWHILE, THE MARXIST FEDERATION OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS (FEUE) HAS CALLED FOR A MASS PROTEST RALLY AT CENTRAL UNIVERSITY IN QUITO ON THE EVENING OF OCTOBER 20. DEMONSTRATIONS ARE EXPECTED.

7. COMMENT: THE INCIDENT AT AZTRA IS CLEARLY THE MOST
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SERIOUS INCIDENT OF ITS KIND IN RECENT ECUADOREAN HISTORY AND THE CONSEQUENCES COULD BE VERY SERIOUS FOR THE GOE. ALTHOUGH THE FINAL DEATH TOLL AND THE TRUTH OF WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED AT AZTRA ARE STILL UNKNOWN, THE GOE IS FACED WITH A POTENTIAL THREAT TO ITS STABILITY. THE CONSEQUENCES FOR THE GOE MAY WELL DEPEND ON HOW THE GOVERNMENT ACCEPTS RESPONSIBILITY FOR THIS ACT. GIVEN LABOR'S CURRENT VIEW THAT UNIONS ARE CURRENTLY SUFFERING SOME OF THE STRONGEST OFFICIAL REPRESSION IN RECENT HISTORY, IT IS NOT LIKELY TO BE CONTENT WITH THE GOE'S CURRENT POSITION OF BLAMING THE ENTIRE ACTION ON EXTREMIST LABOR AGITATORS.
BLOOMFIELD

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